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THE
FALLEN COTTAGE

A POEM

BY

J. C. Rickman.

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God made the Country, and Man made the Town.

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Parsimonia, Diligentia, Justitia Magistra est.*

Cic. pro Roscia.

Entered at Stationer's Hall.

T H E
FALLEN COTTAGE.

IF ought in rustic guise may stop thy eye,

PHILANDER : if the manners of times past

Unpolish'd and uncouth, yet warm and honest,

May with delight detain thee; O unbend,

And give thy willing ear; awhile forget

And yield to short oblivion, all the ties

Of civil labour and the toil which oft'

The patient good for the unworthy bear.

In the strict scale of plain unbiass'd reason
 Weigh, for thou know'st well to balance truth ;
 Weigh, and pronounce if thy dear country yet,
 From polish'd arts increas'd, from science grown
 To manhood, hath acquir'd true profit?—
 Doth now fair Virtue's bud, with influence
 Superiour, spring more vigorous? Moral
 Or social feelings, or domestic, now
 Do they mount above their ancient standard?
 And chaste Religion, doth she purer flow,
 Or with seraphic warmth, the dross of earth
 Purge from this poor terrestrial? Or say,
 Is not fair Virtue, moral sense and social,
 Is not Religion's self a fleeting shadow
 That slips unheeded by regardless man?

Feed then our minds, sweet mistress of illusion,
 With the dear memory of ages past,
 When naked truth and plain sincerity,
 Without one folding in the heart, appear'd
 In all the intercourse of man with man :
 But chiefly, as along the stream thou glid'st
 Of memory, thy sportive pencil draw
 And paint the virtues of a rustic life.
 So, let thy humble Bard, in humble strains
 Responsive, as thou oft' may'st dictate,
 The Cottage, and the lowly Cottager,
 His ancient manners and his life rehearse
 In words not unharmonious : devious long
 A truant wanderer from his native plains,
 Returning, grant him now, and oft' from hence
 In sportive number there to woo the Muse.

Where now the moping Owl, at dusky eve,
 Sends forth her melancholy note, and perch'd
 Sits on the mouldering ruins; where the Yew,
 Though scath'd by many a winter, on yon hill
 Fearless regards the storm, still trim and green;—
 Where the dull Toad lurks silent and unseen,
 Latent by day among spontaneous weeds,
 At night crawls forth to suck the poisonous juice
 That from each baneful rancorous herb transpires:—
 Where crumbling mortar, mixing with the earth,
 Solicits the rank nettle to erect
 It's sharp and biting head above the top
 Of yonder shapeless and uneven fragments,
 ONCE STOOD A COTTAGE; neat was the abode,
 Fair and frequented oft' by neighbouring swains
 Who led a peaceful life in humble joy,

And purity sincere ; ere gross luxury,
 Foul forcerefs, and with her bloated pride
 Had drawn weak man from happiest innocence.

It's Master, Lord of some few acres nigh,
 With decent plenty crown'd his humble board,
 And welcom'd every gueft : an honeft clown,
 In the vain form of idle compliment
 Untutor'd, and in fashion's proud address.
 His foul was open, generous, and brave,
 Difdaining hollow and delufive arts,
 And fmiles fallacious : Nature taught his tongue
 Accents of manly freedom, that declar'd
 No guile lurk'd there. Did he invite a friend,
 To fhare in mirth, and joy convivial,
 Rough was his manner, for he added force

And pull'd him to his table. Kindest force
 It was, precluding thus the bashful, or
 Unwish'd-for answer. Far different they
 Who smile in courts, and when they speak most fair
 Feel not the warmth of blunt sincerity.
 Here all was friendship, all was social truth.

Here, ere the hand of all devouring time
 Had levell'd with the ground this homely mansion,
 Here blaz'd the social hearth, and decency,
 The Housewife's care in simple neatness shone;
 Nor was the scant of rural ornament,
 Or cleanliness, the female's truest pride.

Rude vessels on the board in order rang'd
 Of wood were seen, more costly was not then
 Of common use; not the factitious ware

Of Burslem, since renown'd, or China's pride ;
 But Beach instead of various workmanship,
 Or Ash, or Sycamore supplied their bowl,
 In which their simple fare, each chearful morn
 Of food nutritious, but not season'd high,
 Gave health and vigour to laborious toil ;
 For higher days a rich reserve there stood
 Of Pewter shining in a scatter'd row,
 With earthen cups of many an antique form
 To arrest the gazer's eye, or when a friend
 Superiour came, his nicer taste to please,
 And crown with seeming elegance the feast.

Not far from these was heard the constant clock ;
 That with vibrations solemn measur'd time ;
 It's case with true love knots all o'er bedeck'd,

And

And hieroglyphic figures, or, perchance,

Some dolorous ballad, Bewick and young Graham.

The table next, whose well rub'd surface shone

Had place, and to the window closely stood;

The window with historic legends grac'd,

The noble feats of mighty Tommy Thumb,

Tom Hickathrift, or he, more glorious far,

The Giant killing Jack, whose fame inspir'd

The low born hero, and from peaceful fields

And rural habitudes, oft' sent him forth

In climes remote, to tempt disastrous chance,

And all the tide of fluctuating battle.

So, if the humble with the great we may

Compare unblam'd, young Ammon's rapid war

Shot, like a comet, through the eastern world,

And

And Julius, and the ever gallant Swede,
 Burst forth to deeds of highest hardiment.

Here too with care were fix'd collected songs,
 The work of half an age, whose amorous strains,
 Or tragic, often mov'd the damsels fair
 That once bloom'd here with pangs of keenest woe.
 For as they sung, the melting ditty's theme
 Forc'd from the lucid orb the trickling tear;
 Nature prevail'd, and from th' unconscious eye
 Of innocence unlock'd the generous fluice,
 Whence flow the streams of native tenderness.
 For who, unmov'd could sing brave Percy's fate
 Or gallant Douglas with an arrow slain?
 Or who could fighless hear the widow'd lover
 Sadly complaining upon Yarrow's banks?

C

Or

Or fair Matilda own an equal flame
 To the young Chieftain of the brave Clan Ross?
 Unhappy pair! to ruthless foes betray'd!
 With these, and many more, of love-sick maids
 Of flighted vows, false swains, and broken hearts,
 Hours stole by unheeded,—whilst o'er the breast
 Soft Pity spread a sympathetic glow.

The Elbow Chair, like great Atrides' sceptre,
 From sire to son, in a successive race,
 Transmitted down, majestic fill'd the corner:
 Of Gothic structure, carv'd in varied form;
 Where, interspers'd with foliage, you might see
 The Founder's name, and eke the year of God:
 Easy be sure it was, and gentle rest
 Gave the Possessor, when from work he came,

His labour ended with the setting sun.

Then, conscious joy and pride his bosom swell'd :

For, though the insolence of lordly wealth

Spurns the poor rustic, as a drudging slave

Incapable of relish ; oft' he feels

A joy more justly founded, and more firm

Than the light pleasures of superiour life.

He rose when morning blushes into light,

(With health he rose, and hail'd the soaring lark ;)

To crop the hedge luxuriant, plow the glebe

Direct in furrows, or to sow the grain.

Say, pamper'd sons of elegance and ease,

Who seek the tardy moments to beguile

With artificial bliss, beseems it thus

A lowly swain, rapt with delight, to view

Nature's great works, and joy where Nature joys?
 Or better suits it with the human mind,
 Dissolv'd in all the softness of the sex,
 To fly her haunts, and pace with nimble feet
 Where Folly points, or Fashion leads the way?—
 Ah! little know ye what a balmy gale
 Yon downs, with lawn o'erspread, are wont to breathe!
 What flocks are seen, or on their steepy fides,
 Or on their lofty tops, cropping the wild thyme
 From it's velvet bed! meantime the Shepherd,
 And near him couch'd his lurcher, watchful sits,
 Least on the yellow corn, or on another's soil
 They chance to stray. O'er these our Swain would prowl
 When sober evening spread her mantling shade,
 And tinkling sheep bells died upon the breeze.
 Whilst in the covert of yon western bank

With

With sweet briers wild and bushes thick o'erset,
 The nightingale her liquid notes prolong'd,
 And solemn usher'd in the gloom of night.
 These were his joys, and as on these he thought
 His vows flew up to Heaven; the bounteous gifts
 Dealt forth in nature, rais'd his love, and claim'd
 The just return of tributary praise.

Happy, thrice happy clowns! who thus in peace
 Enjoy the earth's best gifts, with them content!
 How few whom Fortune with a fostering hand
 Has nurs'd, and given to drink insatiate
 Of excess, look with an eye benign,
 With warm benevolence, and kind regard
 Upon the husbandman's domestic worth?
 Yet he a nation's glory, and her strength,

With firmest breast is equal to defend
 Her property, and with his generous labour
 Supply in full abundance all her wants.
 For what is commerce, what is India's store,
 Th' inwasted produce of each far sought clime,
 But means to furnish riot, and debase
 Our nature? what is useful, what for her good
 And sufficient. Providence has given
 To Britain's happy soil.—

See the aspiring tops of yonder Elms
 Moss clad, and thick with many a shadowy branch,
 That in a row avert the western storm.
 These to posterity were thought a due.
 And rear'd to form the cool and safe retreat,
 Where peace, and sweet content, and ease might dwell.

How

How happy they, who blest in fate like this
 By their own fire, with sober thought, and sage
 Reflection fed, from many a tale

Of ancient wisdom drawn; retiring safe,
 Hear oft' the wintry blast, and beating rain,
 With elemental strife impetuous rage !

But Heaven permits to few this bliss to share,
 Uncertain bliss ! and transcient at the best.

Witness this scene that tells a mournful tale !

This ruin'd heap ! as if the careful hand

Of a possessor had not labour'd here !

Thus Heaven directs it's ways, and throws o'er dark
 Futurity a veil, concealing wisely

What to foreknow would cause us endless pain,

Would quite extinguish the gay gleams of hope

That,

That, with alluring prospect, draw us on,
To bear from day to day life's pressive burthen.

Oh! may no vengeance in the store of Fate
Pour on Britannia all it's pointed wrath,
And lay her once fam'd honours in the dust;
Nor ever let her empire's fall become
The theme of Bards, as oft' of Rome they sing,
Now waste and ruinous, by mining arts
Of riot and excess, subdued and sunk.

But whither would the Muse advent'rous roam
To thoughts of ancient lore, and shape her flight
To subjects of deep matter that ill suit
The pastoral reed? Her's is the task to paint
The simple features of a life obscure——
To these returning she directs her strains.

Oft' underneath this Sycamore's brown shade,
 Did childish innocence divert it's day,
 Of human life the fairest, happiest time ;
 Sweet infancy ! devoid of full grown care !
 A thousand tricks, a thousand toys delight
 The sportive fancy : all is peace within,
 And health, and appetite, and wanton play.
 Their little footsteps here oft' mark'd the ground,
 In airy dances round the well-known tree,
 And sports well suited to their infant state.
 Oft' in the sun they bask'd ; the sun to them
 Shone pleasant, and they felt his vivid ray
 With grateful sense. Not so unthinking man,
 Who harbours discontent, and frequent pays
 The bounties of his God with thankless scorn ;
 Though Nature, opening wide her various stores

To view, displays in many a pleasing form
 Her glowing charms, and leads the mind with force
 Persuasive, to that mighty Power, that kindly gave
 All these to happiness; to raise man's thoughts
 To joy, to wonder, and to boundless praise.

Around their wintry fire, methinks I see
 The little groupe, with whom dwelt mirth
 In unaffected guise. Now would a song,
 In the rude accents of an artless swain
 Echo the lowly roof; or Hodge, a tale
 Of humour slyly told, with waggish leer,
 And made the chimney ring with bursts of glee.
 For many a Wit is found within the vale
 Of humble life, and but distinguish'd there
 By natural gibes, and far-fetch'd curious saws.

Here too they romp'd; the neighbouring swains came here
 With ardent love, and strove by mirth to catch
 The blushing fair; apt are the fair to chuse
 The youth of spirit, and the youth of glee.
 And when one far more serious than the rest,
 Refusing still to join the sportive train,
 His stool they tript, and all upon the floor
 The sulky lubber lay. Meanwhile the fire
 And with him, bending o'er the languid flame,
 That pleas'd his ancient dame, and laughing call'd
 To mind their youthful frolicks. In these walls
 The merry Rebeck too it's sprightly notes
 Sounded, and often to the mazy dance
 Call'd forth the lads and lasses of the plain.
 A fairer groupe not Dian's self could boast,
 As oft' she led her nymphs, in sportive train,

By moonlight forth, or on Eurota's bank,
Or Delian Cynthus' Heaven aspiring top.

Happy such days! and days like these there were
In former times, when Pride was not a guest
With rural life. Social all, and chearful,
Frequent they join'd harmoniously to share
The festive day, or summer's lengthen'd eve.
By good old custom all were welcome there,
The lowest hind—there genial freedom reign'd,
And decent humour curb'd by native sense.
There well refin'd from Nature's purest fount,
And drest in modest garb, True Love was seen;
True Love, the tenderest product of the soul,
Dearest and best of passions! felt alone
By those who kneel at Virtue's sacred shrine.

Such were their hours of mirth, but oft' their talk
 On dismal stories fell, disast'rous chances,
 Murders and ghosts, and apparitions,
 And the long train of frightful prodigies.
 Appall'd they sat, and whilst they heard the tale
 Of horror, all around was paleness seen,
 And deep attention. "White as milk it came!
 "And glided with the swiftness of a dart,
 "Along the lone dark lane." Another told,
 "Of headless trunks that stood where three roads met,
 "Then chang'd to mastiffs, then were men again."
 And oh! more dreadful! "How at midnight hour,
 "Strange phantoms drew the curtain." Thus they rais'd
 Ideal terrors. E'en now my fancy paints
 The fear contracted circle, gazing oft',
 As something stalk'd behind. Oft' times the Sire

Such

Corrected these wild fancies; though he form'd
 From ancient tales a system for himself,
 That half admitted of such strange conceits.
 His mate the while, all earnest to their talk,
 Mix'd her story, whilst she cast a look
 Subordinate, to see how look'd her lord;
 For to her own, his judgment was a law,
 And what he credited with her was truth.

A youth, perhaps, sat listening in some nook,
 Just in his school-boy years, and as he drew
 Into his soul the monsters of the night,
 His labouring breast created images
 Great and terrific, such as shake the soul,
 And to the bottom harrow up our nature.
 Perchance in such a school great Avon's son
 First felt the sovereign impulse strike his soul,

Which,

Which, by degrees expanding, led the Bard
 Of fanciful invention prodigal,
 To all those wonders of his tragic muse
 That please in wildness. Yet who would cover
 Genius superiour, when the sons renown'd
 Of fame, in every age and clime have starv'd,
 Coldly forgotten, neglected, and unpitied?

Far happier he, unknowing and unknown,
 Whom rural scenes engage, and humbler arts;
 And, though within his bosom Nature sow'd
 Prime feeds of poesy, and thoughts sublime;
 His scanty lot forbad their rising growth,
 Forbad him tread the barren paths of fame.

Boast they, who will, of an enlighten'd age,
 Of polish'd manners, and of sense refin'd;

Still

Still let the Muse with sacred candour throw
 Her flowers, and of her praises spread
 The incence, where true Merit challenges.
 If polish'd manners lead to dissolute,
 In vain the blazon of the seeming fair
 Of outward 'haviour, solicits her chaste voice
 To give applause; her sentence must condemn
 The bright exterior, hollow all within,
 And void of substance. To humble innocence,
 To chaste desires, and to bounded appetites,
 Bounded by reason, by right reason's rules,
 She willing turns her ever eager eye,
 There pours her gift of tributary song,
 And to such Virtues builds her awful temple.

Expansive thus the heated fancy roams
 Through ages past; views, as if in their prime

These mouldering heaps, as living, they
 Whose tottering walls could yet survive their lords.
 Indulging Fancy, onward might we range,
 Nor count the fleeting moments which glide by
 For other uses than disportive verse.
 To these our care be now; well it beseems
 The Muse's votaries, humble as they be,
 Though scorn'd and spurn'd at by the swollen Great,
 The meaner offices of life to fill.
 Vainly. I ween, nurs'd on the downy lap
 Of partial Fortune, pamper'd by her smiles,
 And borne triumphant down the stream of life,
 Vainly the Proud imagine their's the state
 To which we best are fitted, and to which
 The truly wise aspire. Is not the Pine,

E

More

More to the storm obnoxious than the shrub,

Lowly, but shelter'd from the howling blast?

Your's, Sons of Luxury, be your's the glare

Of vaunting pomp—be mine, a competence;

So shall disease be your's, and appetites

Surcharg'd, whilst I, within the tranquil shade,

With no false guide to point pretended truth,

Unclouded all my faculties, my mind

Untainted by debasing vice, may scan

The purposes of Heaven, and sighless sink

Acquainted with myself, into the oblivious grave.

11:7:49

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